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Country note**

Mongolia

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Mongolia for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002 to 2006.

The situation of children and women

1. The third parliamentary election resulted in a new Government being installed in mid-2000. Key features of the government action programme that pertain to the further fulfilment of child rights include, among others, improving "the quality of health care to meet international standards and achievement of equal opportunity and access to basic education".

2. Mongolia continues to experience the dramatic effects of its transition from a centrally planned to a market economy, and from single party rule to multi-party democracy. Continued dependence on copper, gold and cashmere make the economy vulnerable to downturns in global markets. Herding remains the mainstay of livelihood in rural areas, with increasing livestock numbers becoming a survival strategy. Macroeconomic adjustments are beginning to take root, but many families face increased risks of job and income loss, declines in access to services and stress on environmental resources.

* E/ICEF/2001/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

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3. Children under the age of 18 years comprise some 46 per cent of the population of 2.38 million. About one third of households live in poverty, which poses a substantial basic threat to the fulfilment of children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation. Low population density in rural areas, spread across large distances with poor infrastructure, continues to make the delivery of services difficult and hampers regional economic viability. On the other hand, many of the rural poor and jobless, including young people, are migrating to the major population centres. Urban areas contain more than one half of the total population as well as sizeable numbers of the poor. Social services at all levels are suffering due to inadequate financing of facilities such as *sum* (district) schools and hospitals. The service delivery capacity and population coverage of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also limited and largely confined to urban zones. These patterns present a threat that overall inequality among children may be on the increase.

4. Mongolia has made important strides over the past few years in promoting the rights of children and women. For instance, the Parliament passed a law on child protection in 1996. In addition, the eradication of polio, which is one of the National Programme of Action (NPA) goals, has been virtually achieved. There have been no measles deaths since 1994. The number of primary school drop-outs has declined to about one half of the 1995 level. However, several NPA goals have yet to be achieved, including the reduction of maternal, infant and under-five mortality, as well as protein-energy and micronutrient malnutrition. Under weight and stunting remain unchanged, while the prevalence of wasting has doubled since the beginning of the decade. Data for water and sanitation, among other indicators, are unavailable or are of insufficient quality to confirm the status of progress. Increasing numbers of neglected and street children, with related problems of child labour, drug abuse and sexual exploitation, are a striking feature of the transition period and raise concern among policy makers and Mongolian society.

5. Overall, for children and women of low income and even some middle income families, there appears to be a pattern of increasing vulnerability. For example, Mongolia's economic transition has been characterized by fluctuations in the patterns of child and maternal mortality over the last 10 years. Single parent households, most of whom are head by females, continue to rise both in numbers and as a percentage of total households. The social and economic changes of the last decade have placed tremendous stress on families at all income levels, both rural and urban. Poor herding families appear to be at particular risk to increasing natural threats to their livelihoods, for example, the 1999-2000 *zud* (drought followed by early hard winter).

6. At the end of the decade, there remains a still sizeable challenge with regard to achieving the NPA goals. International cooperation should continue to support the NPA and other reform mechanisms in order to rally forces in Mongolia to achieve the remaining unmet national goals. Additional efforts will need to be made to protect women and children from risks associated with the unpredictable turbulence of socio-economic change. The Government needs to strengthen its leadership in balanced socio-economic policy and coordination among donor inputs in service to reforms. Improved organizational development and technical capacity will contribute much in delivering rights-based actions for children.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

7. The mid-term review of the country programme in 1999 concluded that the programme strategies were appropriate to the country situation at the beginning of the cycle. However, incorporation of the country programme efforts into the national poverty alleviation programme and other key initiatives did not take place or were incomplete. Although the community and health programme was developed in parallel to national policy reforms, it has yet to be incorporated into national drug reform policy efforts and integrated into primary health care services at subdistrict and district levels. Therefore, a longer-term, more complete approach to incorporate key initiatives in national reform policy is required.

8. Integrating and bolstering efforts for early childhood care for survival, growth and development is a more strategic approach for overcoming shortfalls in resources than simply using separate maternal and child health, nutrition, education and protection services. The fuller to participation of young people would also help to curb new threats such as HIV/AIDS/sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and substance abuse, and develop the abilities of a new generation of young parents.

9. The use of pilot approaches to realize universal coverage of basic social services is encouraging, but more potential can be realized. For instance, pilot models in quality basic education require improved programme management with respect to development and demonstration of their effectiveness, efficiency and financial viability so that they become part of the mainstream of basic services. Converting pilot approaches to wider scale coverage could accelerate progress for children during this challenging transition period in Mongolia.

10. Modest success has been made in improving integration and convergence within the programme to address complex issues related to disadvantaged boys and girls at different stages of the life cycle. Although government officials and NGOs participate in both intra-sectoral and intersectoral coordination mechanisms, such groups need to develop more robust ways to promote equal opportunities among children.

11. UNICEF has demonstrated the ability to make a substantial contribution to realizing the potential of United Nations reform initiatives in Mongolia. UNICEF participation and leadership within United Nations Theme Groups have paved the way to better understanding and action in areas for children such as HIV/AIDS/STD prevention and the promotion of adolescent's rights, including child participation. The Common Country Assessment (CCA) exercise proved to be a valuable collaborative initiative towards the formulation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) at the end of 2000. Findings from the CCA have been pivotal to the preparation of the situation assessment and problem analysis of groups of children and women subject to severe survival, protection and development threats.

Proposed country programme strategy

12. The reorganization of government organizations following elections in July 2000 is still under way. Hence the present document describes only proposed broad outlines for the formulation of a cooperation strategy. The country programme preparation process will continue through the end of 2000.

13. The Government of Mongolia and UNICEF will explore five major areas for the cooperation strategy for 2002-2006. The first will be to strengthen current efforts to progressively establish the proper social, economic and legal environment for full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other key conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Second, the cooperation would energize the NPA legal processes and other reform policies and mechanisms for children, with attention to promoting equalities, including gender equality. Third, the cooperation will demonstrate how integrated community-based services for children can be taken to scale as part of national and local development strategies and in connection with UNDAF. A fourth area will be to strengthen human resources and organizational capacity to support key developments, rights-based initiatives and preparedness for crises such as natural disasters. Fifth, a major innovation will be to promote and cultivate more effective partnerships for children in order to contribute to the vitality of the Global Movement for Children.

14. The strategy mix will favour demonstrations and pilot basic services initiatives as practical instruments to improve the quality of policies and programmes for children, and introduce a new era of collaboration with children. Policy development and service delivery will focus on the way of contributing to the evolution of medium- and long-term policies that promote women's and children's rights more holistically, and on the integration of programme innovations into programmes and services. Service delivery will further improve the quality of existing community-based models, with priority to early childhood development. Participation, integration and convergence will be key principles. Mothers, fathers, caregivers, children and adolescents, in particular, will have increasing opportunities to participate in rural and urban community planning and monitoring, as well as in resource mobilization activities.

15. UNICEF will intensify support to capacity-building with a focus on: more comprehensive orientation on child rights and the development of professional skills for all partners; improving the quality of coordination of initiatives related to child rights; and enhancing planning and monitoring skills for higher quality, rights-based initiatives for children and women.

16. Communications and advocacy will be central to building partnerships with young people and women on key rights initiatives. UNICEF will support mechanisms to improve the quality of partnerships among policy, administrative and technical leaders of governmental agencies, NGOs and international, multilateral and bilateral organizations. Such partnerships will focus, for example, on the promotion of regional equality in basic services for women and children.

17. In light of the weakening safety net and recent increase in natural and man-made disasters, an emergency preparedness and response initiative will be an integrated component of the strategy. Preparedness will include support for a more effective early warning system and contingency planning to avert the disruption of health, nutrition, sanitation, hygiene and basic education services for children.

18. To effectively support the new country programme, UNICEF staff in Mongolia will increase their competency with respect to rights-based programming, intersectoral programming approaches, monitoring and evaluation, and partnership formation as well as gender analysis and gender mainstreaming.

Estimated programme budget

19. A detailed budget by programme is not provided due to the need for completion of the strategy development process with the Government. The estimate for overall programme cooperation is $4,309,000 from regular resources and $4,000,000 from other resources for the period 2002-2006.